

CHAPTER XX

BY WAY OF SUMMARY

THE outstanding characteristic of the China of to-day is, as we have seen, the clash of two cultures, with the partial and progressive disintegration of the one which we think of as traditionally Chinese.

The civilization which at present seems in process of disappearing was the product of a long evolution. Its development was marked by great stages, each with its distinct characteristics. In spite of the fact that certain features occur again and again through much of its course, Chinese history is by no means, as some would have us think, a repetition of movements identical except for the names of the actors.

As is the case with most cultures of ancient origin, the beginnings of that of the Chinese are veiled in obscurity. We first catch glimpses of its outlines sometime in the second millennium before Christ in what is known as the Shang dynasty. There was then living on the fertile plains of North China, on the lower course of the Yellow River, a race whose blood appears to be the dominant strain in the population which still inhabits that region. It had written characters (an archaic form of the present script), depended upon agriculture for subsistence, used bronze for some of its weapons, implements, and utensils, had a vigorous and by no means crude art, and already possessed a political organization of some complexity. How much of the culture was autochthonous and how much an importation from

the West or
South is still a matter of conjecture and debate.
We know that
many centuries and perhaps millenniums before the
Shang, primi-
tive man inhabited what is now North China and
that at a time
not very remote from and perhaps contemporary
with the Shang
men on the edge of the bronze age and using
polished stone imple-
ments and a painted pottery lived in the valley of
the Yellow